

The Washington Post

# THE VIRGINIA WEEKLY

Thursday, January 28, 1982

## Corporate Day-Care

*Kids at the Office:  
A New Option  
In Fringe Benefits*

By JURA KONCIUS

Washington Post Staff Writer

**R**achel Riley always takes her kids along to the office. In fact her employer, Mount Vernon Hospital, encourages her to bring the two preschoolers.

Mount Vernon is one of a small but growing number of Northern Virginia employers to become involved in the business of day-care.

"The program is a lifesaver," said Riley, a medical secretary at Mount Vernon, which opened a day-care center for employees' children early this month. "I recently had another job offer, but I elected to stay at Mount Vernon because of this center."

"The interest in the business community is just starting," said Jane Angrist, Alexandria's child-care coordinator, who is working with the Chamber of Commerce to stir up local interest in the corporate day-care concept. "It's still a coming thing."

In recent years, a small number of concerns around the country—notably the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Worker's Union in Verona, Va., and Boston's Stride Rite Corp.—have begun offering employees some form of subsidized day-care, either at the place of business or nearby. Other firms have started clearing-houses for local child-care information to help their workers find quality, reliable child-care.

Although it's still a trickle and not a trend, some Northern Virginia businesses also have begun to gather facts and figures about the increasing demand for day-care among their workers as the number of families with both parents working increases each year.

"We have been working toward helping raise the consciousness of employers about various ways to provide assistance to their employees for day-care," said Judith Rosen, director of the Fairfax County Office for Children. The office, she said, has fielded



By BRIAN A. GRIFFIN for The Washington Post

about 15 recent requests from Fairfax businesses wanting child-care information.

One of these was the National Wildlife Federation in Vienna, a nonprofit organization with close to 500 employees.

"We are one step away from starting our

own day-care facility," said Nan Clarkin, a member of the company's day-care committee. An employee survey on the idea yielded response that Clarkin termed "very favorable, even from employees with no children." The company has started gath-

ering information and applying for grants to help start the program, she said.

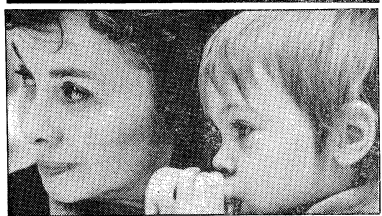
The federation envisions a double benefit from getting into child-care: "We can

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By LUCIAN PERKINS—The Washington Post  
Frances Damico, director of Mount Vernon Hospital's Child Care Center, with Katie Burgess, who is waiting for her mother Carol to finish work.

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take care of employees' children, plus we would have a lab setting to develop curriculum that schools can use with science and environment and conservation emphasis," said Clarkin.

Three Northern Virginia hospitals—Mount Vernon, Arlington and Jefferson—offer on-site day-care. Hospitals have been in the forefront of the corporate day-care movement here and throughout the country partly because of a nationwide nursing shortage and also because of their high percentage of female employees with irregular shifts, making child-care a problem.

According to a study released last May by the Fairfax County Child Care Advisory Council, 54 percent of all county children under age 12 live in a home where all adults are working, an increase of 46 percent since 1974.

Even with 193 licensed day-care centers and family day-care homes in Northern Virginia, the need for day-care is increasing. "We even have waiting lists filled with names of unborn children," said one center operator.

The Fairfax survey, which stressed above all the need to increase the supply of day-care in the county, specifically suggested that the county help employers plan, develop and operate day-care programs.

"There's a lot of interest now in corporate day-care," said Rosen. "So many more women with young children are working (now) so it's a recent need. It's become so much more expensive that families are looking for some sort of assistance in finding and paying for their day-care. Employers have assumed a whole variety of responsibilities—employee counseling programs, health care programs—and now some employees are looking for some sort of day-care assistance from their workplace."

"Remember the movie '9 to 5'?" asked Betty Shelby, coordinator of family day-care at the Northern Virginia Community College Child Care Center. "One of the first things that Lily Tomlin did after she tied up her boss and took over the company was to start a child-care center in the basement of the office building."

The Tomlin method may be the only solution at most businesses, which don't put day-care at the top of their priority list for employee benefits.

"We investigated setting up our own day-care facility after a few employees approached us," said a spokesman for one high-tech firm in Springfield who had called Rosen's office last year. "But we saw it would take \$100,000 just to get the place set up. Another consideration was that we are located in an industrial park, and if I were a parent, I would prefer to have my kids in a residential neighborhood in day-care." The spokesman asked that the company name not be used lest "employees get their hopes up."

But despite its preliminary legwork, this company of about 350 employees was hit by government contract cutbacks. "The whole issue has taken a back seat now," added the spokesman. "Now we are just trying to keep people employed."

Rosen said the current economic

climate need not rule out a company's involvement in day-care, however. "There are many options and it's just not on-site day-care or nothing," she said. "Many employees may not want to bring their child into work with them; they want the child near their home."

As options, companies could run a clearinghouse for outside day-care information for their workers or contract with an outside day-care center, which is what the Fairfax Hospital Association did.

Early this month it contracted with a nearby day-care center that would accept children of employees at Fairfax Hospital, Commonwealth Hospital and the association headquarters at special rates to be paid by parents. The hospital runs a shuttle bus service to take the children, ages 2 to 5, the mile between Fairfax Hospital and the day-care center.

Though the employer picks up only the cost of the bus in that arrangement, Mount Vernon Hospital spent \$80,000 to begin its day-care center in a vacant wing. "The employees pay \$55 a week, which is not cheap, but the center is staffed with a lot of very good people," said Mount Vernon Administrator Stephen Rupp. According to Frances Damico, the hospital's day-care director, 61 children have enrolled in the month-old center.

Rupp added that although the fees will cover day-to-day operations, the indirect costs such as use of the building and utilities will be provided as a subsidy by the hospital.

Businesses also could opt for the "cafeteria" approach to benefits, Rosen said. With so many two-parent working families, one parent's benefits often duplicate the other's. So, explained Rosen, a company could offer a full range of benefits—including vacation, sick leave, health care and day-care—and give employees the chance to choose the specific elements that would make up their own benefit packages.

Companies that have had the resources to start their own center have found the move good for employee morale and possibly even for productivity.

Sharon Davidson, director of the six-month-old day-care program at Arlington Hospital, said the 17-hour-a-day center has been a huge success and "has also helped in terms of people coming to work regularly and promptly."

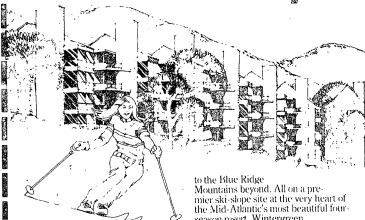
Mount Vernon's Rupp said that although the center costs the hospital some money, the facility realizes other gains. "We feel it will keep us competitive in hiring skilled professionals," he said.

At Jefferson Hospital, this has already been the case. "In the last year, the hospital has been able to hire eight full-time and six part-time nurses because they offer these services," said Mary Jo Eagen, Jefferson's day-care director.

"I can save money on gas," said Mount Vernon's chief anesthetist, Carol Burgess, who brings her 2-year-old daughter to the center regularly. "And this facility is the best thing I've ever seen."

"The center gives me peace of mind," said Deborah Dannelly, a medical technologist at Mount Vernon. "I know that if something happens, I am right here."

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# MIKE CAUSEY

## THE FEDERAL DIARY

### Action to Protect An Executive Perk

Rank in government, the military or the corporate world has its privileges. And one of them, if you rank high enough, is that you get your own private washroom, fresh towels daily and that sort of thing. And one of the things that really irks a VIP is to walk in and find an unauthorized person in the executive john.

Which is one reason the director of the Veterans Administration has a new lock on his door. And why there is now a full-time guard outside same. And why VA is planning, at a cost of around \$10,000, to take out the "compromised" code system and install a key lock on the private, executive elevator that leads to the private 10th floor executive suite, which leads to the once-private executive bathroom.

It seems that last week VA Administrator Robert P. Nimmo and an aide returned to the headquarters building around 7 p.m. to catch up on some paper work. They took the private elevator up through the mostly dark building and were very, very surprised to find a member of the cleanup crew in the VIP john. VA sources say the man was not cleaning up.

Alarmed that Nimmo's quarters were so easily penetrated, VA asked the General Services Administration to send in the locksmiths. And the practice of providing a \$9.75 per hour guard, 11 hours per day to watch the executive offices, which was dropped shortly after Inauguration Day, has been reinstituted.

VA brass say the water closet intruder is not the only reason for the security clampdown. But they concede his discovery started the wheels in motion. Aides in charge of security decided that because he is a high-profile federal official running a controversial federal program, the 52-year old Nimmo (a former state senator and fiscal aide to Ronald Reagan when he was California governor) needs better protection than he was getting up until last Thursday at 6:59 p.m., when he popped in on his uninvited guest.

**Day-Care Facilities:** Some federal agencies have them, others don't. Where there are facilities, most are the result of negotiations between unions or employee groups and management. Last summer, the Office of Personnel Management balked at the proposal of its American Federation of Government Employees local that the personnel agency provide free day care for employees.

OPM pointed out that such things can cost a bundle, and said its authority was limited to asking the Office of Management and Budget for more money and, things being the way they are, that probably wasn't such a hot idea. The case bounced up to the Federal Labor Relations Authority, which ruled (FLRA No. 76) that agencies must negotiate with unions over the day care issue, but did not say they have to grant it.

**Ruth T. Prokop,** former chairman of the Merit Systems Protection Board, has joined the international law firm of Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle. Prokop, who came here during the Johnson administration and also served as general counsel of the Housing and Urban Development Department, will be based in Washington.

**Religious Leave:** Federal workers may elect to work compensatory overtime if they want to take time off for personal religious services (according to Public Law 95-390). They may work the unpaid overtime — on an hour-for-hour basis to match their time off — before or after their religious observance time off. Bosses may disapprove the leave, however, if it causes problems with the mission of their agency.

Meantime, the National League of Cities Weekly reports that the inspector general's office of Health and Human Services suspects there is some abuse of the religious leave system. An HHS spot check of time used in the Social Security Administration, according to the Weekly, showed that lots of people put in for special religious time off between Christmas and New Year's, and around the Independence Day holiday in July when few organized religions have much to do.